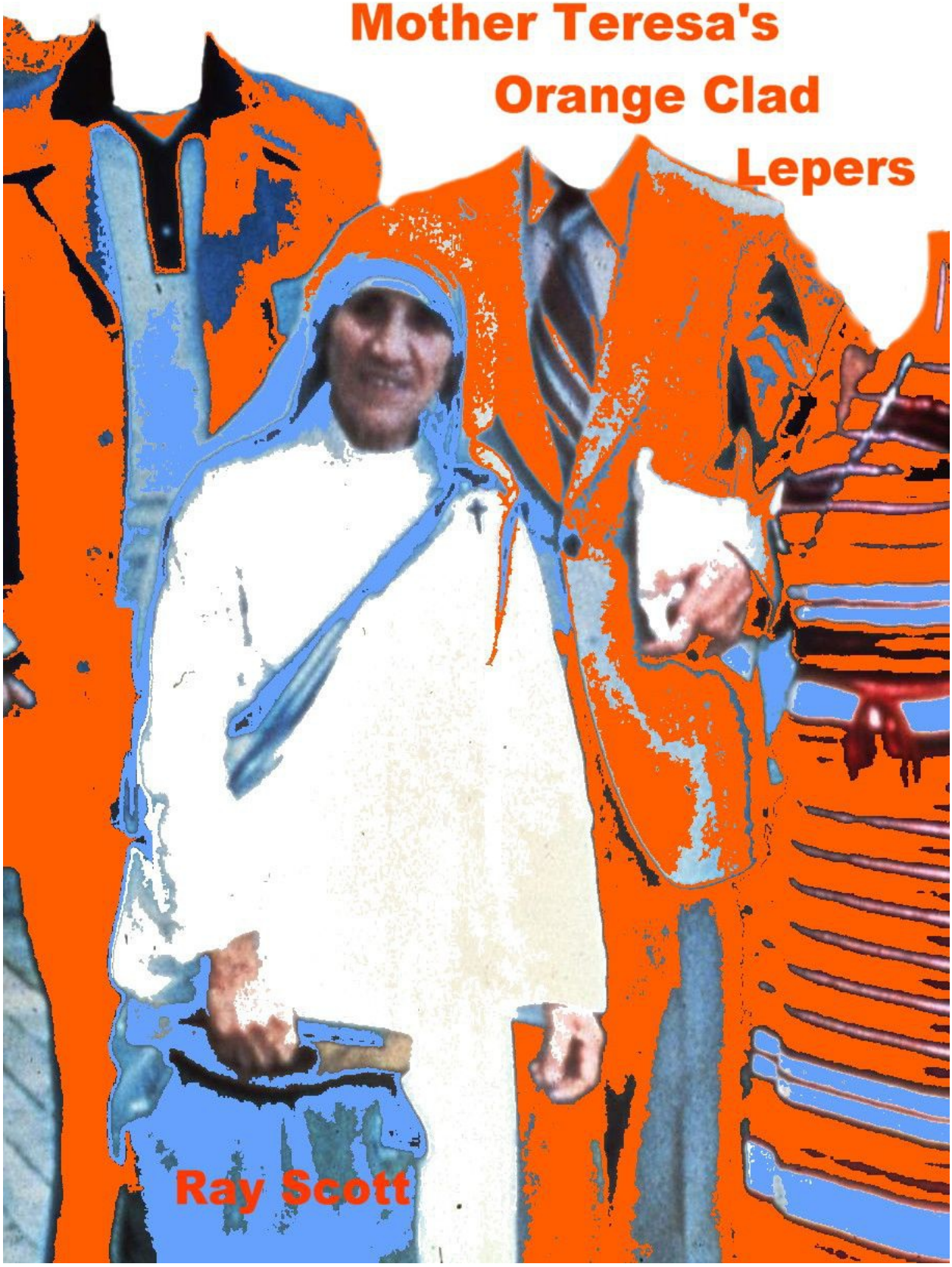
Mother Teresa's Orange Clad Lepers



Ray Scott

Mother Teresa's Orange Clad Lepers

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http://hmspress.ca
hmspress@outlook.com

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National Geographic

During an unusual Range lock down
blue-shirts scurry around the room
while a lone white-shirt bellows
instructions about discipline and decorum
only those without a jail mentality
will remember or adhere to at all.
My celly and I rush into our cell,
unpack essentials and our canteen.
when all seems quiet before lunch
and the bright winter sun reflects
off new snow through cell window,
I see the title of the magazine
placed atop the blue-grey table.
We have a laugh at the title
National Geographic seems to have
labeled this Penetanguishene jail:
"The Truth About Black Holes."

World Peace

On Christmas day I wrote a haiku
and placed it in a small sketch
I made of my cell window and a
dozen or two cinder blocks of
the wall separating me from snow.

Yesterday's altercation keeping me
from that sunny birth tree memory.
Being the reason for the season
I should have added color so the
walls would have been bathed
in yellow light, trees in green shades,
barbed wire and old lamps in silver.

Christmas Day,
the search for world peace,
continues.

The Buoyancy of Salt

The sweet smell of freedom
fills my lungs with light air
while out my window, rain.
First spring tempest passing through
swells the storm drains to overflow.
Then while my mind soars southwest
to home, first real meal, daughters, I
detect one of Mother Nature's mysteries.
All along the storm trench, seagulls.
Swooping, landing, eating grubs, waddling
everywhere but in the fresh rainwater.
Out my cell window not one single gull
ventured into the draining water trough?
Could it be the buoyancy of salt?
Maybe like the Inuit words for snow,
Seagulls have half a dozen for water?
Then the clap of thunder and darkness.
I look out towards home and they are gone.

Georgian Bay
for katherine gordon

I don't know this area, just
minutes from Barrie and Georgian Bay.
Six feet of blanketing pure snow
cover and trees in dormancy.
That and the lamp, road and fence
are all I've known for four months
outside this 3X1 foot window
from my white and blue-gray cell.

I have a good friend near Kitchener
who has the identical country view:
crystalline snow, felled and bate trees,
cumulus clouds floating like hawks,
and the Eramosa River.

She, however, has three things I don't:
a front door, access to a car, and
a little road that leads away.

Rumor Humor

The blue-shirted guards do
the thirty-minute walk through.
So it was to our great surprise
that this one particular fellow
decided, hands on hips, to bellow
"Lock up! Everyone to lockup!"
Holy crap! Something must be up
so I stopped and loudly yelled,
"everyone is to go in only one cell!"

It was then I recalled the rumor
that guards have no sense of humor.

Waking Hour

One month ago at waking hour
this early time had no sun.
Out of my cell window was black,
reflecting back to reveal only me,
standing and staring at memories.

One month later, creeping light moves
with the wind and trees appear
in the short distance behind the fence.
Hibernation in effect for all animals
but the ones dressed in orange.

Electricity opens the cell latches,
we all pour out grumpy and tired
to the much larger Range area
where at least temporarily, we
embrace our small view of freedom,
30 feet wide, 45 feet long and 25 feet high,
penned in by over 4000 concrete blocks.

Turn, Smile and Wave

The weekend lockup, softened
by the Green buds of a late spring
has attracted us to cell windows
as the small meadow attracts animals.
Hibernation snow melted and revealed
small mammals hungry for anything.

My daughter talked on the phone earlier,
wanted to know when dahlias go in, and
how deep to plant gladioli and seeds
while trillium and skunk cabbage
appear from the winterless forest soil
outside our narrow cell window.

When my celly moves his head away
I see her and her sister laughing,
collecting blue-bells along the wire fence,
watching squirrels dig up memories
they left in the fall, near old stumps.
My daughters disappear into the birch forest.
I'm sure I saw them turn, smile and wave.

Early Bird Gets The Worm

It's easy not to notice the barbed wire
on this greener than normal Mother's Day.
Overnight Alder, Birth, Pussy Willow, Aspen leaf
a lemon green haze in early morning sun that
my celly wishes would stay out our window only.
Worse behavior. Early bird gets the worm.
The worm doesn't know that though. He
only thinks like we do, here in our hole
that waking from winter, thaw in the air,
sun and warmth, await them. Remember us?
Descending from the dense forest sky
a hundred Starlings and Georgian Bay gulls
pounce on the dew coated grass, early bird style.
The sudden change in color from gray to bird
snaps me from my spring fever leaf lull.
Worse behavior! Remember us? Apparently not.
Someone in an adjoining cell pounds the window
and a black and white cloud of feathers,
beaks, tails, and feet flee for higher pastures,
safe only from the sound and not the fence.
Off to the edge of my vision and to the north
I spy a Robin I hadn't seen, land and feast
with the others. Wing and barbed wire meet
for no more than ten to fifteen long minutes
while off in the woods in a roost in the sun
three chicks wait and cry out: Mom, Mom, Mom!
Remember us?...Worse behavior.

The Bus

God, Jehovah, Allah. The true Trinity,
merged into one not by the believers
who were zealots in their own interpretations
but by those who see past the old ways,
the revenge, the hatred, the plague of locusts
to find the true goodness of those three religions,
to see the world from the eyes of a child.
Innocent of color, race, creed, belief,
who, somewhere, anywhere, everywhere
in this struggling, polluted, selfish world
wakes up her father in the dark night
on a bus on the long road home from anywhere
to somewhere and sees an old albino man
under a solitary ceiling light and asks
in every tongue of this earthly Babylon
as it travels over pavement, gravel or sod,
"Daddy, tell me, is that God?"

The Barrier Between You And Me

The barrier between you and me
is only a steel door, wish there was more.
These cubicles and lion's dens are all
composed of concrete and steel where
sound has no boundary, like yours.
No, from my cell your voice is boundless
like Much Music at upper volume.
Echo. Echo. Echo...Echo.
worse behavior should only be
the song title not the lack of silence
bouncing in this orange canyon.
While others wait patiently for trial,
for food, for poker, for showers, for sleep,
I wait at the end of day beside my
heavy steel door praying for your voice
to penetrate no more, to think
perchance to dream. Not. All day long:
scream, shriek, shrill, squall, bellow,
clamor, vociferate, hoot, bleat,
echo, echo, echo...

I wake up in the morning and you're still there.

Tracy

The way the guard smiled at me
on the evening rounds at my cell
made me dispel the impression
I had of her hard-hearted ways on days.
An act of subtle superiority and not
misogyny, as others had supposed and
the hint of Jasmine as she strolled,
meandered, sauntered, did her rounds
left me daydreaming not of escape
but walking on the grass, the park
with her on my arm, into town
engrossed in our own social intercourse.
The sound of the Range door woke me
and the lights went out, for me and the day.

Penetang Penitentiary

Apparently without hesitation
word has spread underground,
kited through steel doors,
passed on after a breach or
mixed messages in classrooms, that
our Range, our Unit, our group of cells
is the best, safest place to be
in this Penetang Penitentiary.

Makes one wonder though, why
the guards haven't seen the fights,
heard the bullying, muscling,
lonely cries at night at a distance,
the river of bigotry, racism, greed,
homophobia. superficiality we've,
observed from our cells on the Range?

Makes one wonder though, what
are the other 8 Ranges like
to make us the Mother Theresa’s
of orange clad Lepers.

The Heart Strings of Half-Friends

Years ago in an early missive
my just re-widowed mother
penned to me a future guideline
I never until then, thought of,
nor shall I ever forget:
"One doesn't have friends in jail,
they are only half-friends. Friends
are only found on the outside."

How true, except maybe for you,
or you, or you or perhaps...you.
Yet even after forty-five years of
searching for childhood companions,
schoolmates, girl-friends, workmates,
and Vietnam draft lodgers, and love,
I sit here in my concrete cell
imagining, considering, entertaining
the thought of and holding in esteem
the memory of compatible friendships.

So now that you have all been freed
and in my cell I am left alone,
I can only hope once again to hear
the heart strings of half-friends
on the phone or letters in the mail,
calling my name, where they can find
the heart strings of a friend.

All The Feeling Words

I'm Afraid I was Disgusted at
how Anxious and Determined my
Angry self was so Determined
to be Aloof and also Defiant while
being ashamed and Depressed as
these Aggravated words Amused me
while I Dumbed Down literacy.

By being Bashful but not Bored,
Content to Cautious Cheerfulness
I became Courageous and Curious,
Energetically Ecstatic and Excited
though Exhausted with Embarrassment.
I couldn't choose between a Flippant
Fearfulness or Frantic, Frightened
Friendliness. I was so Frustrated.

Good. I'm Grateful I got that off
my Inadequate Guilty conscious in an
effort to be Happy and not so
Hatefully Helpless where I felt Hostile
as I Humiliated my Hungry Hurt as I
was Hysterical to stop being Impatient
while being Inadequately Indifferent to
my new found Independence. By
being Insecure I Irritated my Isolated
inner voice who was Madly Jealous.

Lonely, Lonesome, and Alone, I was
Wanting a Loving Friendship but
I was Overwhelmed with Optimistic
Mad Nervousness for the first time.
Oh My God! I Panicked, was Paranoid
and Perplexed but Pessimistically
Playful. Pleased with my Powerful
output and Putout but Regretful at
the same time while Relieved at
how Ridiculous and Resentful
my Response was
and how Rotten and Sad my life.

My inner voice said "hey Sexy,
I'm Satisfied your Selfish Shaky
soul will come Clean. Don't be Shy
Silly. Don't Smother yourself
with Sadness Stupid." I'm Stupefied
to be Tearful. I'm now Thankful
it Threatened to be tough with me.
I'm no longer Unhappy and Uptight.
I am a Unique person not Vengeful.
I once felt Whipped and Wicked.
Now I am no longer Worried that
time Wounds all heals, not even mine.

My One On One With Ashley

When you couldn't make it here today,
I went to the visitor's meeting lounge
and left a part of my life on each chair.
On the first two seats I left prose and poetry,
feeling words such as thankful and haiku tea.
On the next seat just a little life history,
with space at the front for herstory.
I'd think it vain to see my reflection
in the endless mirrors engulfing perspective
and remembering to leave a few polished mirrors
for you to reflect on the answer questioned.
On the last ten chairs, one for each remaining week,
I left: thoughts, questions, surprises, humility,
wonder, inquiry, family, pets, humor, and travel.
When you couldn't make it here today
I polished your portable chair and placed
everything under an invisible force field
only you can open with a handshake and a smile.

Turnkey The Turkey

Gray never looked more beautiful
from behind one inch grass.
With all the glanced at colors
we've seen since snow melt:
bronze Rudbeckia, golden buttercups,
Red Fox, azure sky, trees
in shades of green, and silver wire,
the only symbol of jail freedom
for all of us is to be as free as a bird.
Today the feathers of choice
belong to a large gray turkey
pushing four new chicks along the fence.
On second viewing she'd found a hole
and is on the same side as we are,
pacing, looking, hoping, waiting, soon,
to be with them as we are.

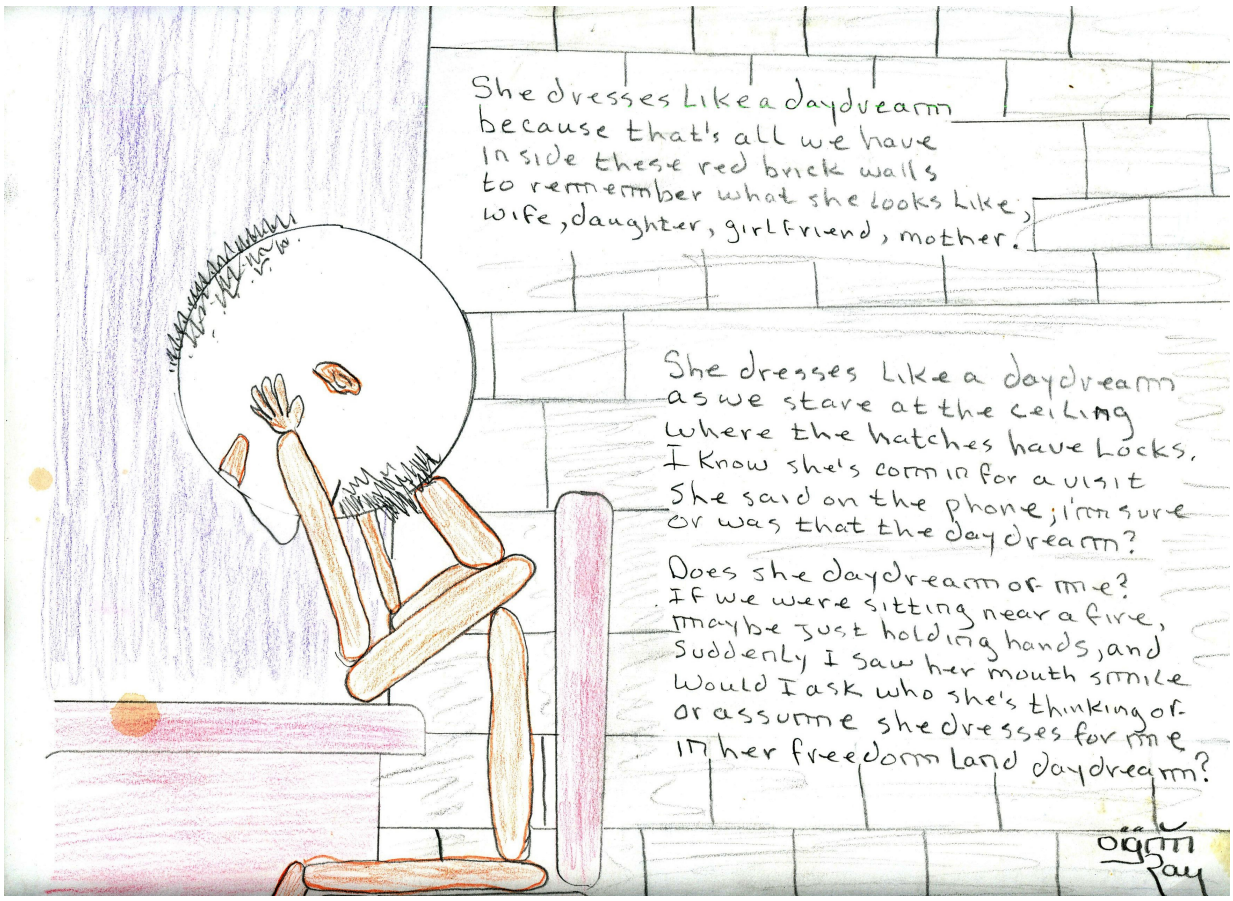
Cumulus Sky

The frail cumulus sky, a
reflection of this wintered earth,
too cold for even the birds,
hangs above Spruce and Birch
outside my claustrophobic cell.

Tuesday the earth tilted enough
to allow a heavy beam of light
to angle from the Range window,
engulfing me alone at lunch time
in hot stupefying blindness.

Today though, out my window
I only see the gravity of snow.
The sun beams cold and silver
on the coiled razor wire and
while it's the identical sun,
Tuesday's only beams internal.

Last night's snowstorm returns
to blow away billowing clouds,
whirl diamond snow against pane,
and my mind drifts to Birch,
gathering dead wood for a fire.

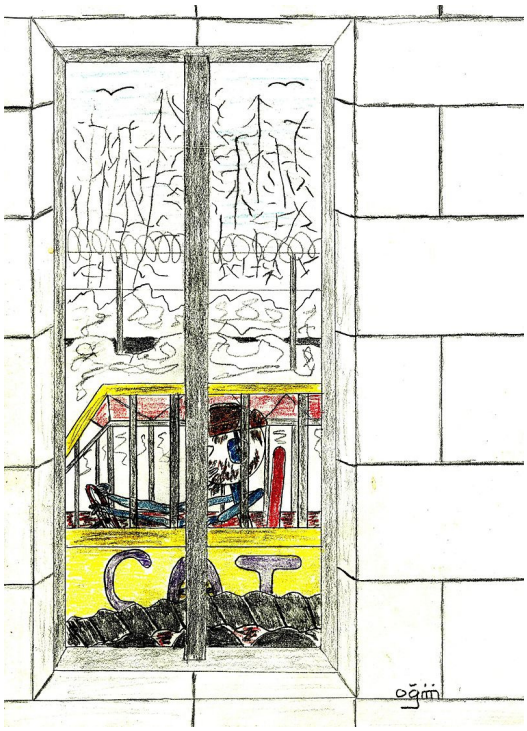

She dresses like a daydream
because that's all we have
inside these red brick walls
to remember what she looks like,
wife, daughter, girlfriend, mother.
She dresses like a daydream
as we stare at the ceiling
where the hatches have locks,
I know she's coming for a visit
She said on the phone; i'm sure
or was that the daydream?
Does she daydream of me?
If we were sitting near a fire,
maybe just holding hands, and
Suddenly I saw her mouth smile
Would I ask who she's thinking of
or assume she dresses for me
in her freedom land daydream?

Mr. Noodles

At Elgin Middlesex Detention Center
in London, the cell windows are
three white-tailed deer wide.
In the centre common area, the
window can fit one hundred thousand
migrating Starlings, or two families
of white-tails with spring fawns
and three swooping red-tailed hawks.

In Stratford on St. Andrew Street
even the time bathroom window can,
on a summer's day accommodate weddings,
the River Avon, a small parkette
with crab apple blossoms falling
near female students in pink shorts.

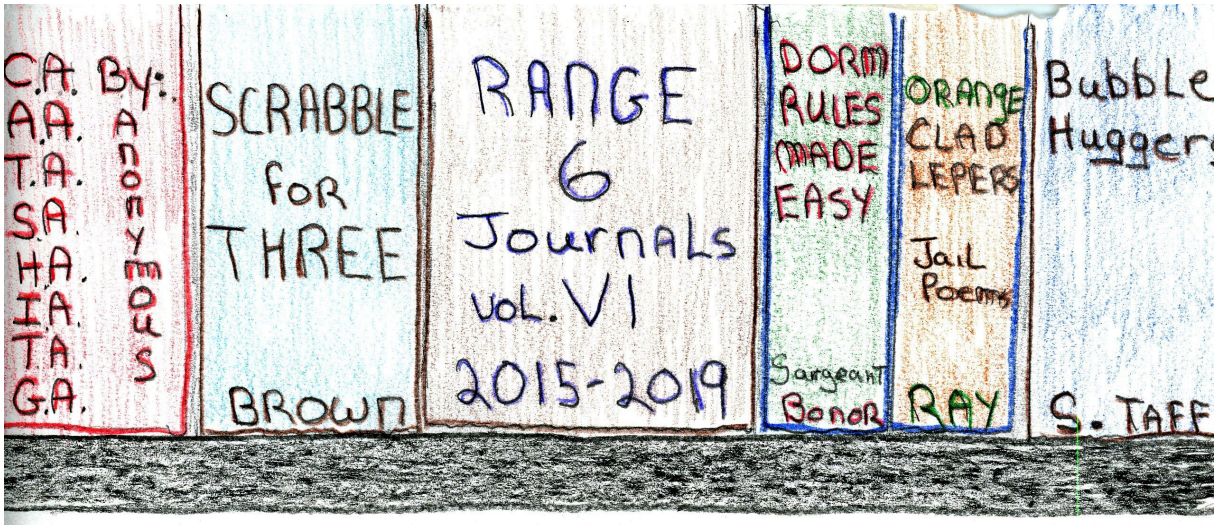
Here at Penetang on Fuller Avenue
my cell window boasts wind and snow,
blue sky and a grove of white Birch
if I care to raise my lazy head
above the empty cup of Mr. Noodles
blocking the snow plow on its way
around this fenced in building.

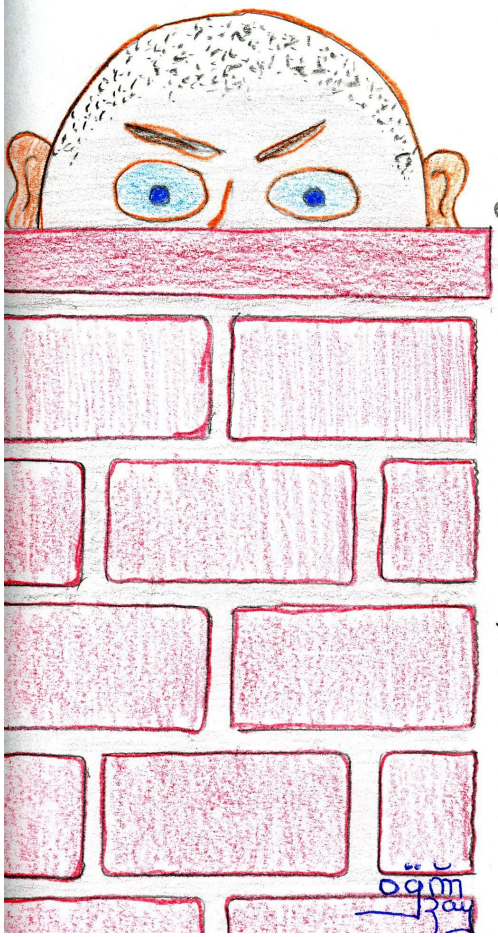


Real Friends And Half-Friends

Letters arrive regularly here
from my family and friends.
Although the list shortens
as my incarceration lengthens.
You know who your real friends
and half-friends are as the sun
recedes out the cell window.
I do write back immediately, but
as the days grow longer and
the cell view gets better, I
drift back to my former life
sorting mail at the Post Office.

In 5 seconds I could send mail
to all 10 provinces and all major cities,
go home after night shift comforted
by the thought that most will be
delivered by the next return to work.
Here, I could state out the window
for 3 days before jail mail leaves
the inspection process, 1 day to
the nearest Mail Processing Plant
where someone else sits at shift,
5 second sorting my mail to be
delivered next day or two with a smile.





The sun MAY set in the west
but here our sunset Lingers
above the wall of the YARD
In early afternoon class time.
Heads bowed not in prayer
but pushing pencils and pens
along sheets of Lined paper
at the speed of words, then
the actual westerly Sunset.
Heads rise, eyes move to Yard
as sudden winds force snow
off the roof in darkening air

Sun is done, white becomes
Time becomes dinner, Night.
television.
Unlike most college classes
We aren't allowed to go
home.

We Aren't Allowed To Go Home

The sun may set in the West
but here our sunset lingers only
above the wall of the yard
in the early afternoon class time.
Heads bowed not in prayer
but pushing pencils and pens along
sheets of lined paper or reading
at the speed of words, then
the actual Westerly sunset.
Heads rise, eyes move to yard
as a sudden wind forces snow
off the roof in the darkening air.
Sun is done, white becomes night,
time becomes dinner, television.
Unlike most school and college classes,
we aren't allowed to go home.

Range Rules
1. Do your own
2. No fighting
Poker up
HOME
HOME

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